Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Planning Committee
Wednesday, January 13, 2010 – 12:00-3:00 p.m.


Update from SACS Annual Meeting

- Current hot topics for QEPs at other institutions are: writing across the curriculum, inquiry, and critical thinking
- University of Richmond’s QEP established a sophomore scholar-in-residence program, a collaborative living-learning community that was designed to connect students’ curricular and residential lives (Link to QEP Executive Summary)
- Norfolk State conducted curriculum/program mapping when constructing their SLOs
- University of Houston’s QEP is “Discovery-Based Learning: Transforming the Undergraduate Experience through Research” (Link to Discovery website)
- Western Carolina University’s QEP is “Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning” (Link to WCU’s QEP website)
- Marymount University’s QEP, “DISCOVER: Inquiry, Scholarship, Creativity, Research,” changed their entire freshman program to promote a greater emphasis on inquiry-based learning (Link to Discover website)
- Sessions provided models for designing assessment while designing programs so that you’re thinking about what will be measured as it’s being developed

Additions to Background Chart – What’s Already Happening?

- REUs and foundation funding leads to summer research programs that fuel conference presentations and publications
- Colonial Athletic Association (CAA) Undergraduate Conference
- Department-level showcases (e.g., Chemistry and Psychology)
- CHSS has a database of dissertations (but not yet master’s theses) and is developing a way for students to develop their own research bio pages, which is something that faculty in the college are already doing
- The libraries have an infrastructure for collecting electronic and retaining theses and dissertations

Discussion about Norms, Values, & Attitudes

- Matt presented about dynamic modeling and planning for the QEP
  - We’ll want to think about how various norms, values and attitudes are being continually reinforced
  - Why do they persist and how can we change them?
  - What intrinsically motivates faculty and students?
  - What are the barriers we’re assuming when thinking about what we want to change? And, what are the barriers that are really there?
- Students actively participate in open discussion outside of the classroom with students and faculty in their discipline or field
  - Opportunities for application can be a student’s motivation for taking a class
  - A student’s enthusiasm for taking a class would extend beyond course requirements
This would result in students having a greater appreciation for different perspectives on a central issue

- Students will think for thinking’s sake, valuing intellectual curiosity
  - How can faculty get students into the habit of doing this?
  - We’ll need to flip students’ current motivators so that they’re not focused on the piece of paper at the end of their education
  - There needs to be some loosening of the curriculum so that students can explore areas that are interesting to them

- The QEP activities cannot just take place over one semester – we’ll need to consider how they can be scaffolded over a period of time
  - One way of doing this is to push students in gen ed courses to think more broadly and to take their thinking to the next level
  - We’ll want to remember graduate students and the role that they can play in this scaffolding of activities

- How can we convince faculty that they need to change the way they teach in order to create the environment for fostering a culture of scholarship and creative activity?
  - It needs to be embedded in the majority of our courses
  - We’ll need to think about institutional factors that don’t help and how to get faculty on board with the necessary changes

- Students at Mason are “socio-academic”
  - There is a disconnect between what takes place both in and outside of the classroom
  - Coursework informs engagement outside, but the two are never intentionally brought together

- We need to make scholarly dialogue more accessible and intriguing to students in classes
  - Concerns about faculty members assuming that students are coming to class unprepared
  - How do/can faculty members set the expectation that students will read before coming to class?

- Discussion about expectations for faculty
  - We’ll need to revisit the items on the course evaluations
    - Example: how many times did you discuss course topics with your peers outside of the classroom?
  - Non-course-based activities will need to be rewarded by the university so that faculty feel that they “count”
  - We can frame the expectations of faculty (for tenure) and the activities included under the QEP as connected and moving toward the same end result
  - This QEP will need to be framed as satisfying the research “block” of the tenure and promotion guidelines
  - Are there ways to change annual reviews and tenure and promotion guidelines so that these activities are taken seriously?

- We’ll need to keep in mind the unique profiles of Mason students (their family life, socioeconomic status, etc.)

- We’ll want to include work study opportunities in this
  - Possibilities for establishing a fund that would add to wages?

- Possibilities for establishing collaborations with NOVA, along with common learning outcomes
  - CHHS has been doing this with their Social Work, Nursing, and online learning programs
  - ICAR does this as well

- The QEP should lead to an increase in organizational commitment

- Faculty must gain greater respect for their students’ capabilities
  - The more faculty are engaged with students, the greater respect they will have for them
Greater student engagement will enhance faculty members’ perspectives on their own teaching
Should be develop possible faculty outcomes for the QEP? (there is a FSSE)

- Concerns that teaching is becoming an increasingly regulated activity at Mason
- There should be a strong discourse that goes beyond the stated student learning outcomes and is “unintended learning”
- We could consider adding “plug-ins” or modules to existing courses as a way to take advantage of the librarians
  - We could run courses with modules as a hybrid
  - These modules would need to be effectively integrated into the courses so that they aren’t just repeating what’s already been taught in a course
  - We could develop something similar to BYTE Week that targets students and gives them the tools they will need to complete a course
- We should consider including more peer activities in classes as a way to get students to take each other seriously as scholars
- Concerns that tenure-track faculty will be more interested in having a student help them with their own research than mentoring a student on their student-initiated project. Models of student research vary by discipline.
- We’ll need to capture the mentoring of undergraduates and graduates
- Most faculty choose to be faculty to impact their students – they’re not solely interested in the rewards and money or they would be doing something else
  - Many faculty are already motivated to provide these kinds of activities for their students
  - We should be looking at this from a strengths-based perspective

Moving forward…
- We will work in subcommittees throughout the spring semester
  - Where does non-course-based scholarship show up in these subcommittees?
- Conduct an inventory of what the university would look like if you were coming to Mason with fresh eyes – in terms of institutional goals and culture
  - This needs to start from a place of what we’re currently doing to contribute to this
  - What does the administration do to encourage faculty to think in these ways? What are some barriers that can foster faculty members’ belief in their jobs?
- Conduct an inventory of courses with research, creativity, or scholarship in the title
- Who else do we need to talk to?
  - Academic advisors (through Angela Jenkins in the Academic Advising Center)
  - International students (target student groups under the international umbrella)
  - Students who come to campus to take classes and leave (might target PSYC 100, COMM 100, etc.)
  - Non-traditional age students (through Jeannie Brown Leonard in the BIS program)
  - Transfer students (through Fran Herrity and Ann Lewis in the Transfer Center)
- We’ll want to think about classroom assessment techniques
- We’ll need to provide examples of what faculty could be doing in their classes